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May 8, 2020

Dr. Alina Alonso, MD
Director
Florida Department of Health in Palm Beach County
P.O. Box 29
West Palm Beach, FL 33402

Dear Dr. Alonso:

I write to request your expert opinion as to Palm Beach County's readiness to proceed with reopening certain businesses and other venues as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

COVID-19 has infected over 3,615 people in Palm Beach County and, tragically, over 229 county residents have died. The County ranks third in the State in both confirmed cases and deaths.

In addition to the heroic efforts of Floridians on the frontlines of this crisis, all Floridians have made sacrifices to help protect members of our communities. Community mitigation efforts to slow the spread of the virus have required cancellation of large gatherings, closure of businesses, and people to stay home as much as possible—away from their jobs and separated from family and loved ones.

While these efforts saved lives, they also produced devastating economic impacts. Over one million Floridians have filed for unemployment benefits. The impact of historic job losses was exacerbated by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity's failure to manage its application and payment system causing unacceptable delays in claims processing. Less than half of the 1.1 million unique unemployment claims filed since March 15 have received payment over the past seven weeks. Businesses that Floridians have poured their savings, hard work, and lives into have been ruined. I am committed to meeting the economic challenges of this crisis, and I want to reopen our economy and society as soon as possible. But unless we have the public health tools and strategies in place to keep Floridians safe, I am deeply concerned about the risk of renewed outbreaks that will cost more Palm Beach County residents their lives and only deepen the economic pain endured by workers and business owners.

To address those concerns, I write to follow up on previous requests regarding State and County efforts to develop a comprehensive public health plan that includes testing, contact tracing, supported isolation, disease surveillance, and specific guidance for businesses, schools, faith communities, and the general public. The development and implementation of such a plan will

be necessary not only to prevent renewed outbreaks, but also to give the public the confidence to return to work, school, their congregations, and businesses that have been shuttered for the past six weeks. In fact, pursuant to the most recent coronavirus response legislation (P.L. 116-139), signed by President Trump on April 24, 2020, the State of Florida is required to submit a testing plan to the federal government by May 24, 2020. The State's efforts to expand testing capacity is noted, but it is not enough without a comprehensive plan to use that capacity to prevent new outbreaks in Palm Beach County and our state.

As of this writing, I have not seen a plan that details Palm Beach County's readiness to detect new infections quickly, trace and isolate all contacts of newly confirmed cases, and prevent renewed outbreaks and continued community spread of the virus. Yet, today, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced that he would end the County's exemption from Executive Order 20-112 and allow Palm Beach County to begin phase one of reopening on Monday, May 11, 2020. While I await the governor's testing plan as required by P.L. 116-139, I ask that you provide answers to the following questions (first submitted to your office by e-mail on May 1, 2020) regarding the County's readiness to reopen safely:

1. On April 27, 2020, President Trump released a new testing blueprint document. Does the Department of Health currently have a testing plan that meets the guidance including the core elements for (1) robust diagnostic testing (2) timely monitoring systems, and (3) rapid response programs?
2. Will the Department of Health produce a written comprehensive testing, surveillance, and response policy that addresses the issues in the federal guidance?
3. Does the Department of Health need additional resources to implement such a plan?
4. The Department of Health recently announced hiring of 200 additional epidemiologists, will any be located in Palm Beach County? Will the Department of Health hire any additional staff to implement its testing plan in Palm Beach County?
5. Is the Department of Health currently tracing contacts of every new confirmed case? What instructions is the Department of Health providing to people who have come into contact with confirmed cases?
6. Will the Department of Health focus its monitoring for new outbreaks around the recreational activities that are the first round of relaxed mitigation efforts?
7. Will the Department of Health release guidance for businesses, employees, and consumers regarding when they should seek testing, especially for asymptomatic individuals? How often should people seek tests? Are there risk categories based on the types of employment or activities people engage in that would require more frequent testing?

8. What is the current plan for supported isolation of new cases and people who come in contact with new confirmed cases? Will individuals be offered accommodations to assist with isolation to prevent spread of the virus within households?

Over the past seven days I have not received responses to these questions. Given the governor's announcement that Palm Beach County will begin phase one of reopening on Monday, I ask that you provide responses by Sunday, May 10, 2020.

I greatly appreciate the work you are doing to keep my constituents safe and to inform Palm Beach County residents of the risks and prevention strategies that will save lives from the novel coronavirus. You have put science and public health expertise into action. We need your voice, and the voices of other public health officials, to lead our efforts as we consider relaxing community mitigation policies and reopening our economy.

Please do not hesitate to call on me if I may be of assistance to you as we work together to respond to this crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Deutch", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ted Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS